



# ***Quality Matters:*** **Inter-Institutional Quality** **Assurance of Online Courses**

**Sponsored in part by the U.S. Dept. Education  
Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary  
Education (FIPSE)**

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# Quality Matters

Quality *does* matter to ...

- students
- faculty
- administrators
- institutions
- consortia
- accrediting agencies
- legislators
- tax-payers

How do we ...

- identify & recognize it?
- motivate & instill it?
- assess & measure it?
- insure it?
- assure it?



# *Quality Matters: Inter-Institutional Quality Assurance in Online Learning*

- Grantor: FIPSE
  - Grant period: 9/03 – 8/06
  - Award: \$509,177
- Grantee: Maryland Online
  - Voluntary statewide consortium: 15 community colleges, 5 senior institutions

**[www.QualityMatters.org](http://www.QualityMatters.org)**

# MarylandOnline

- Voluntary statewide consortium dedicated to support of distance learning in Maryland
- Goals
  - Faculty training
  - Sharing of seats in online courses
  - Facilitate collaborations among members
  - Provide statewide leadership in distance education

# FIPSE Interested Because ...

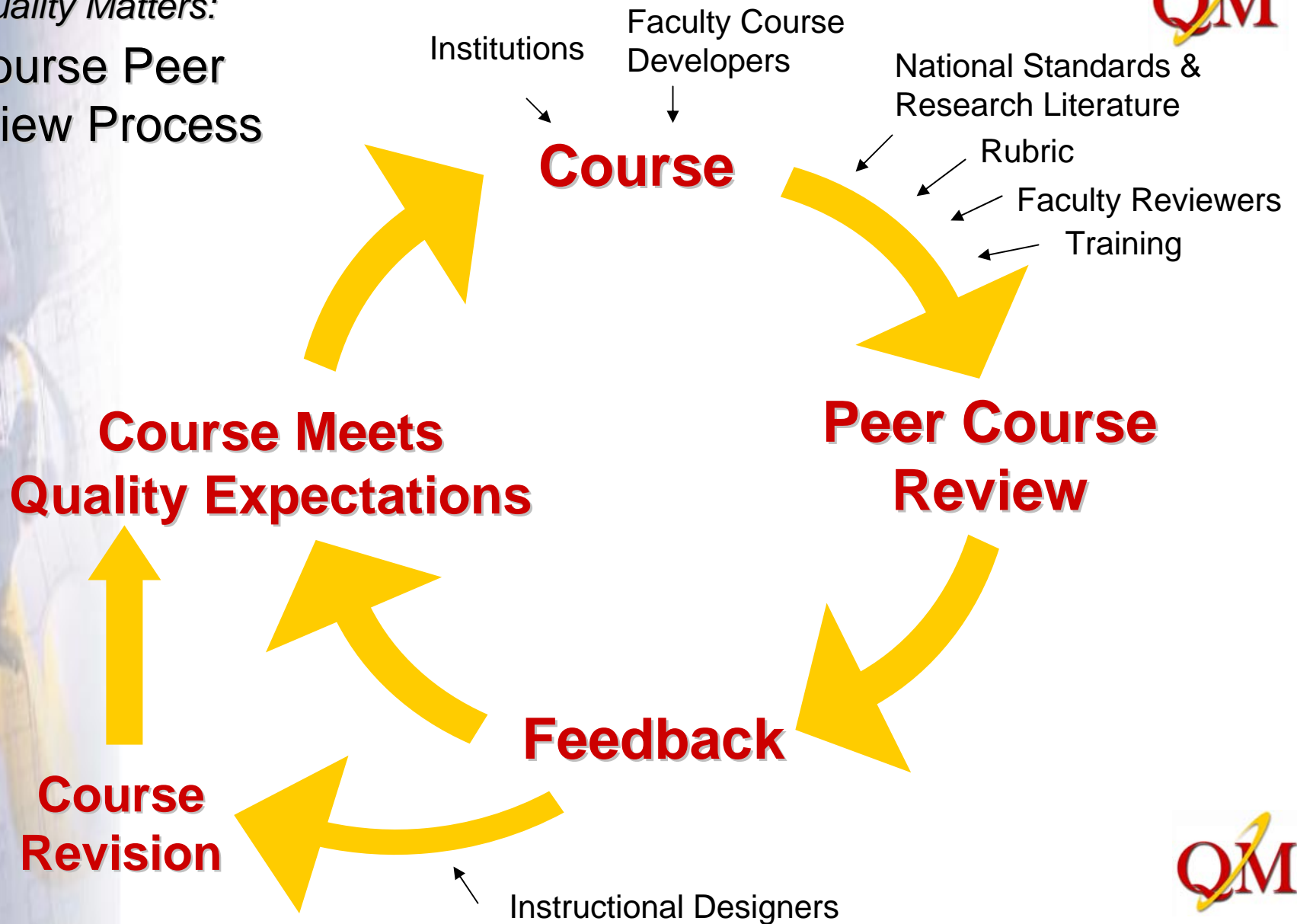
- Quality assurance of online courses is important
- *Voluntary, inter-institutional* assurance has never been done before
- This can serve as a national model

***Quality Matters!***

# National Participation

- Individuals & programs from 128 institutions across 28 states
- Kentucky Virtual University (KYVU) a partner from the beginning

*Quality Matters:*  
**Course Peer  
Review Process**



# Major Themes

- develop *inter-institutional* consensus on criteria & process for online course QA
- *assure & improve* course quality
- positively impact *student learning*
- *faculty-centered* activities
- faculty training & *professional development*
- foster *sharing* of materials and expertise
- promote *voluntary* participation and adoption
- ensure *institutional autonomy*
- replicable, reliable, and scalable processes

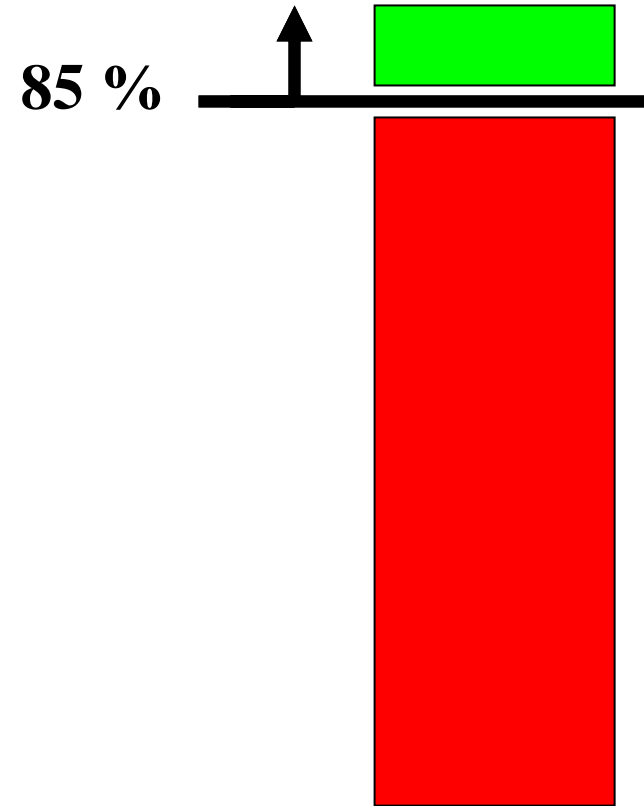


# Underlying Principles of QM

- The QM toolset and process are:
  - based in national standards of best practice, the research literature and instructional design principles
  - designed to promote student learning
  - integral to a continuous quality improvement process
  - part of a faculty-driven, peer review process
- Course does not have to be “perfect” but better than just “good enough.” (Standards met at about 85% level or better.)

# For Our Purposes, Quality Is...

- More than average; more than “good enough”
- An attempt to capture what’s expected in an effective online course at about an 85% level
- Based on research and widely accepted standards



# Underlying Principles of QM

- Process designed to ensure all reviewed courses will eventually meet expectations
- Review team must include an external peer reviewer
- Course faculty or instructor considered part of the review team
- Collegial review process, not an evaluation process

# What this process is NOT

- Not about an individual instructor  
(it's about the course design)
- Not about faculty evaluation  
(it's about course quality)
- Not a win/lose, pass/fail test  
(it's about a continuous improvement process in a supportive environment)

# QM Collegial Review vs. Evaluation

## A QM review is

- Ongoing
- **Focus:** course design
- **Outcome:** course improvement
- Voluntary, non-threatening
- Confidential with full disclosure to faculty
- Team approach that includes the faculty member

## A faculty evaluation is

- Single point in time
- **Focus:** delivery
- **Outcome:** decision on performance, promotion, tenure
- Win/lose situation
- Confidential/secretive

# Design vs. Delivery

**The faculty member is  
integral to *both* design and delivery.**

**Course Design ...**  
is the forethought  
and planning that a  
faculty member puts  
into the course.

**Course Delivery ...**  
is the actual teaching of  
the course, the  
implementation of the  
design.

**QM** is about **DESIGN** - *not* delivery or faculty  
performance

# What's In It For Institutions ...

- External validation
- Strengthen accreditation package
- Raise QA as a priority activity
- Access to a sustainable, replicable, scalable QA process
- Inform online course training & practices
- Provide professional development activities

# QM Process Provides

- Institutional toolset and *process* to meet quality expectations:
  - Online course design
  - Student learning
  - Improved instruction
  - Assessment and feedback loops
  - Professional development



# What's In It For Faculty ...

- Improve online courses
- External quality assurance
- Expand professional community
- Review other courses and gain new ideas for own course
- Participation useful for professional development plan and portfolio
- Receive \$150 for each completed peer course review

# Rubric

- Based in
  - research literature
  - nationally recognized standards of best practice
  - instructional design principles
- Used by review teams to:
  - assess course quality in 8 key areas (40 review elements)
  - provide feedback to faculty course developer
  - provide guidance to instructional design support team

# The Rubric

- Eight standards:
  - Course Overview and Introduction
  - **Learning Objectives**
  - **Assessment and Measurement**
  - **Resources and Materials**
  - **Learner Interaction**
  - **Course Technology**
  - Learner Support
  - ADA Compliance

**Key components  
must align.**

# Rubric Features

- Living document
- Web-based
- Automated compiling of team report
- Annotations
- Examples

# Rubric Scoring

Standards	Points	Relative Value
14	3	Essential
12	2	Very Important
14	1	Important
<b>TOTALS</b>		
<b>40</b>	<b>80</b>	

- Team of three reviewers
- One score per standard based on majority
- Two criteria to meet quality expectations:
  - “Yes” to all 14 Essential Standards
  - Receive at least a total of 68 points

# Review Teams

- 3 faculty peer reviewers:
  - 1 from home institution, 2 from others
  - 1 from same discipline, 2 from others
  - mix of CC & 4 yr schools
  - mix of large & small schools
  - mix of public & private schools
- Faculty course developer
  - access to rubric prior to review
  - involved in pre-review discussions
  - consulted during review

# Peer Reviewer

- Selection Factors
  - Prior training to teach online
  - Extent of online teaching experience
  - Currency of online teaching experience
  - Content area
- Requirements
  - Sign MOU
  - Attend peer reviewer/rubric training

# Rubric Training

Focus on:

- Application of rubric to course review
- Interpretation of review elements
- Constructive feedback
- Ensuring competencies



# QM to Date

- Overall Participation:
  - Individuals & programs from 128 institutions across 28 states
- Course Reviews:
  - 103+ courses reviewed
  - 18 MD schools; 10 non-MD schools
- Peer Reviewer Rubric Training:
  - 571 trained



## External Partners

- Kentucky Virtual University (KYVU)
- Sloan Consortium
- Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)
- Western Cooperative for Education Telecommunications (WCET)
- Towson University (MD)
- Michigan Virtual Community College Consortium
- Portland Community College (OR)
- Florida Community College of Jacksonville (FL)
- Raritan Valley Community College (NJ)

## Advisory Board

- Middle States Comm on Higher Ed
- MD Higher Education Commission
- MD State Department of Education
- Penn State University
- Minnesota Online
- Defense Acquisition University
- US Naval Academy
- Miami University (OH)
- South Dakota Electronic Univ Const
- Northern Virginia CC
- Bucks County CC (PA)
- Education Direct
- Kaplan College

# Awards - 2005

- WCET Outstanding Work (WOW) Award, November 2005.
- USDLA 21<sup>st</sup> Century Best Practice Award, October 2005.
- Maryland Distance Learning Association (MDLA) Best Program Award, March 2005.

# National Participation

## Reported Uses of QM System:

- Guidelines for initial online course development
- Quality assurance of existing courses
- Ongoing faculty professional development
- Institutional reaccreditation packages
- Formation of distance learning policies & steering committees

# Participant Feedback

- 97% of trained faculty agree/strongly agree that “QM will impact the quality of teaching and learning at my institution”
- >90% of ...
  - Peer Reviewers elect to participate again
  - Faculty Course Developers elect to become Peer Reviewers

# Overall Course Review Results

- Upon initial review:
  - 51% meet expectations
  - 19% do not meet expectations - missing at least one essential 3-point element(s)
  - 30% do not meet expectations - missing at least one essential 3 point element(s) and a minimum of 68 points

# Post-Course Review

- Met expectations
  - Most made suggested improvements!
- Did not meet expectations
  - Improvements made/in progress for all
  - Most improvements made by faculty
  - Some ask for ID support

# Common Themes

- Course reviews revealed 11 common areas for course improvement
- Elements that are missing in 20% or more of the courses reviewed
- These are potential targets for
  - faculty training
  - special attention in the initial course development phase:



# Common Areas for Improvement

- Instructor self-introduction (I.4) 22%
- Activities that foster interaction (V.2) 22%
- Technology/skills/pre-req knowledge stated (I.6) 24%
- Links to academic support, student services, tutorials/resources (VII.2-VII.4) 24-27%
- Learning objectives at module/unit level (II.5) 27%
- Netiquette expectations (I.3) 32%
- Self-check/practice with quick feedback (III.5) 38%
- B/W alternatives to color content (VIII.4) 54%
- Alternatives to auditory/visual content (VIII.2) 59%

# Looking Ahead - Rubrics



- Annual review & update of research base and rubric
- Rubrics in development
  - Hybrid/Blended courses
  - K-12 (with MSDE)
  - Continuing education
  - Professional training
  - Face-to-face courses

# Looking Ahead - Project



- Adapt rubric & process for specific institutional needs
- Promote the integration of the QM process within institutions
- Explore the “QM Program/Institution” concept
- Diversify training program
- Sustainability plan
- Develop partnerships

# Interested in Participating?

- Stop by Poster/Table for a mini-Rubric
- Visit & use rubric at [www.QualityMatters.org](http://www.QualityMatters.org)
  - Especially to view rubric annotations & research matrix
  - Register for monthly newsletters
- Self-review your course, develop a course improvement plan, implement the changes, assess the changes
- Consider having your course peer-reviewed
- Talk to your KYVU Representative

# More Information

[www.QualityMatters.org](http://www.QualityMatters.org)

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